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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Prevention of
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Forty-ninth session
Item 2 of the provisional agenda

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, INCLUDING POLICIES OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND SEGREGATION AND OF APARTHEID, IN ALL COUNTRIES, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES: REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMISSION UNDER COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS RESOLUTION 8 (XXIII)

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Action by Christians for Abolition of Torture, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[21 July 1997]

Torture used to terrorize the population

1. The international community should refuse to let itself get accustomed to the use of torture and serious violations of the dignity of the human person as a mode of government currently practised by certain States. The International Federation of Action by Christians for Abolition of Torture (IFACAT) wishes to draw the attention of members of the Sub-Commission to such practices in certain countries, while realizing that they also exist in many others as well.

Mexico

2. IFACAT is alarmed by the extent to which torture is prevalent in Mexico. It is used as a method of investigation by the police and the army. It is also a means of intimidation and punishment in the struggle against subversion, particularly in the regions of Guerrero and Chiapas. Despite the existence of laws against the use of torture, the behaviour of the armed forces and the police and the practice of the courts, which accept confessions and testimony obtained by torture, render this legislation null and void.

Colombia

3. IFACAT is greatly concerned at the massive violations of human rights committed by the army and paramilitary groups in Colombia. They affect trade-union leaders, human rights activists, political opponents and the civilian population of villages. In some rural areas, the civilian population are the victims of particularly brutal repression. They have to suffer forced resettlement, carried out under threat and in a climate of general terror, murders, massacres, disappearances and attacks committed by paramilitary groups, self-defence groups and rural security cooperatives (who have a duty to inform the Government on the guerrilla situation), but also by guerrilla fighters. The peasants find themselves caught between guerrilla violence and the army's counter-measures.

4. Despite repeated appeals by the international community to the Colombian authorities, no effective steps have been taken to dismantle the paramilitary groups operating with the support and under the coordination of the security forces, nor to prosecute those responsible for human rights violations. There is impunity in over 90 per cent of human rights violations. The absence of any attempt to deal with the matter is reflected in the continuance of serious violations of fundamental rights and strengthens IFACAT's constant fears for the safety of the civilian population.